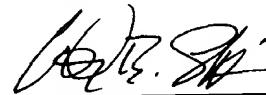


REMARKS

The purpose of this Preliminary Amendment is to eliminate multiple dependent claims in order to avoid the additional fee. Applicants reserve the right to reintroduce claims to canceled combined subject matter.

Attached hereto is a marked-up version of the changes made to the claims by the current amendment. The attached pages are captioned "**Version With Markings to Show Changes Made**".

Respectfully submitted,



Harry B. Shubin, Reg. No. 32,004
Attorney for Applicants
MILLEN, WHITE, ZELANO & BRANIGAN, P.C.
Arlington Courthouse Plaza 1
2200 Clarendon Boulevard, Suite 1400
Arlington, VA 22201
Direct Dial: 703-812-5306
Facsimile: 703-243-6410
Email: shubin@mwzb.com

AJZ(HBS):jmm

VERSION WITH MARKINGS TO SHOW CHANGES MADE

Claims 5, 7, 8-10, 12-13, 15 and 17-19 have been amended as follows:

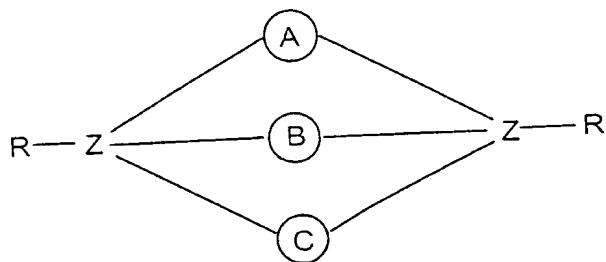
5. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of~~ claims 1 to 4, characterized in that the oligonucleotide consists of ribonucleotide or deoxyribonucleotide units, one of which may comprise a functional group introduced onto or generated on said unit, or the functional group introduced using a spacer arm bonded to the terminal phosphate group in the 3' or 5' position.

7. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of~~ claims 1 to 6, characterized in that the oligonucleotide comprises a chain of 5 to 50 nucleotides or a chain of 5 to 50 nucleotides and nucleotide or nucleoside analogs.

8. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of~~ claims 1 to 6, characterized in that the oligonucleotide consists of a chain of ribonucleotide or deoxyribonucleotide units bonded to one another via phosphodiester-type bonds and of analogous units of nucleosides bonded to one another via amide bonds, said oligonucleotide comprising at least 5 phosphodiester-type internucleotide bonds at the end intended to be bonded to the cryptate.

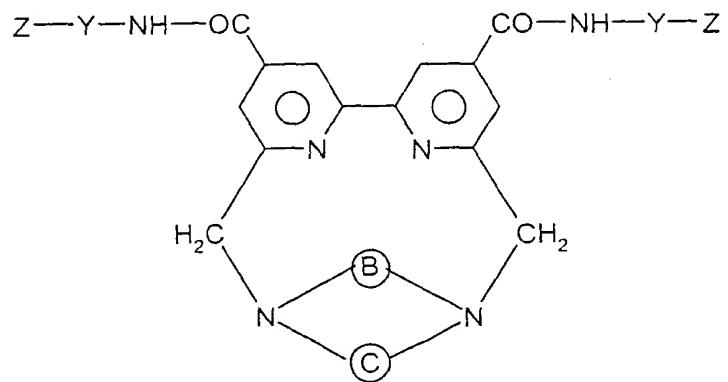
9. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of~~ claims 1 to 8, characterized in that the rare-earth metal cryptate is bonded covalently to the oligonucleotide either directly or via a spacer arm.

10. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of~~ claims 1 to 9, characterized in that said rare-earth metal cryptate consists of at least one rare-earth metal salt complexed with a macropolycyclic compound of formula

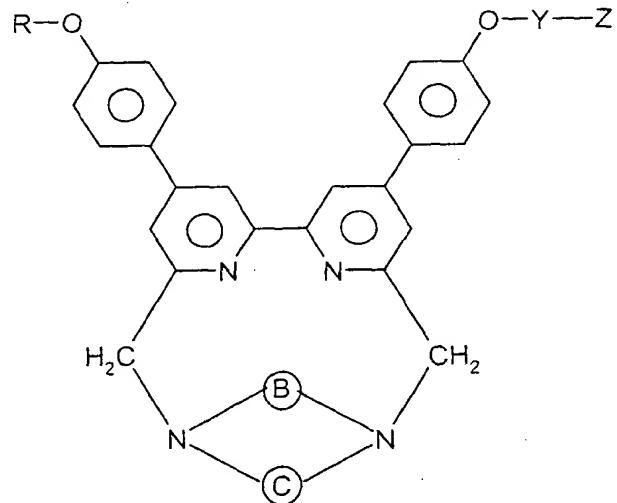


in which Z is an atom with 3 or 4 valencies, R is nothing or represents hydrogen, a hydroxy group, an amino group or a hydrocarbon-based radical, the divalent radicals (A), (B) and (C) are, independently of each other, hydrocarbon-based chains which optionally contain one or more hetero atoms and are optionally interrupted with a hetero macrocycle, at least one of the radicals (A), (B) and (C) , also comprising at least one molecular unit or consisting essentially of a molecular unit, said molecular unit having a triplet energy which is greater than that of the emission level of the complexed rare-earth metal ion.

12. (Amended) The process according to any one of claims 1 to 9, characterized in that the rare-earth metal cryptate consists of at least one rare-earth metal salt complexed with a macropolycyclic compound corresponding to one of the formulae II or III below:



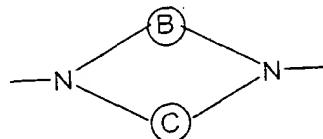
II



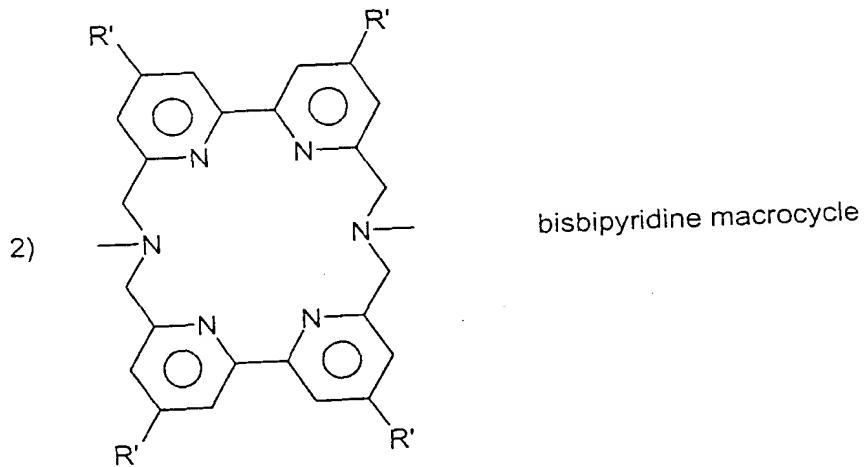
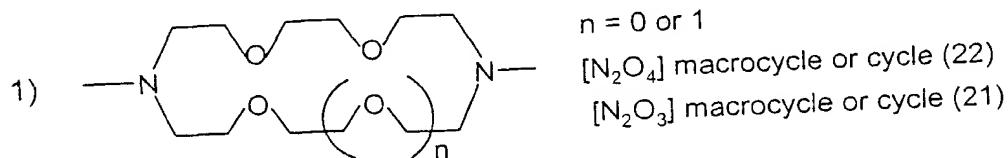
III

in which:

- the ring of formula



is one of the following rings:



-Y is a spacer group or spacer arm which consists of a divalent organic radical, chosen from linear or branched C₁ or C₂₀ alkylene groups optionally containing one or more double bonds and/or optionally containing one or more hetero atoms such as oxygen, nitrogen, sulfur or phosphorus or one or more carbamoyl or carboxamido group(s); chosen from C₅ to C₈ cycloalkylene groups or chosen from C₆ to C₁₄ arylene groups, said alkylene, cycloalkylene or arylene groups being optionally substituted with alkyl, aryl or sulfonate groups;

-Z is a functional group capable of bonding covalently to a biological substance;
-R is a methyl group or represents the group -Y-Z;
-R' is hydrogen or a group -COOR" in which R" is a C₁ to C₁₀ alkyl group and
preferably represents a methyl, ethyl or tert-butyl group, or alternatively R' is a group -CO-
NH-Y-Z.

13. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of~~ claims 1 to 12, characterized
in that the rare-earth metal cryptate is bonded to the oligonucleotide via a spacer arm
consisting of a divalent organic radical chosen from C₁-C₂₀ linear or branched alkylene groups
optionally containing one or more double bonds or triple bonds and/or optionally containing
or more hetero atoms, such as oxygen, nitrogen, sulfur, phosphorus or one or more carbamoyl
or carboxamino group(s); C₅-C₈ cycloalkylene groups and C₆-C₁₄ arylene groups, said
alkylene, cycloalkylene or arylene groups being optionally substituted with alkyl, aryl or
sulfonate groups.

15. (Amended) The method as claimed in ~~any one of~~ claims 1 to 14, characterized
in that the rare-earth metal cryptate is a europium cryptate.

17. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of~~ claims 1 to 16, characterized
in that the fluorescent conjugate is used as the only label or as one of the fluorescent labels in
the assay.

18. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of~~ claims 1 to 17, characterized
in that the fluorescent conjugate is bonded covalently to one of the members of a pair of
molecules capable of binding specifically to one another, in particular a cellular receptor, an
antigen, an antibody or a nucleic acid.

19. (Amended) The process as claimed in ~~any one of~~ claims 1 to 18, characterized
in that, in addition to said fluorescent conjugate, a fluorescent label comprising an acceptor
fluorescent compound in the assay.